

## Contributed

"AND IT WAS NIGHT."

Edwin A. Wilson.

The conspiracy conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, takes on its culminating proportions at the Passover when Judas, a devil, received the sop and went immediately out ("and it was night") to set on foot the last act of the final tragedy in the betrayal of Jesus. Jesus, the faultless friend of whom Judas Iscariot himself, the betrayer, later said: "I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood." Pilate the Roman Governor, and Herod, the King, both declared that they could find no fault in Him. Pilate also said: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person." The wife of Pilate said: "Have thou nothing to do with that just man." The Roman Centurion watching Jesus, when he saw the earth quaked, said: "Truly this was the Son of God." But Judas' confession, and the testimony of the others, could not arrest the working out of the plot, which was to issue in the death of the Son of God. Like many another, Judas could not stay the course of disaster devised by Satan through him. Men, essentially weak in themselves, become a restless torrent for evil when led captive by the devil at his will. Even men, professedly the children of God, subject to the weakness of the flesh, when tested, often stumble and utterly fall.

This was remarkably illustrated in those chosen to be with and near their Lord. For it is written, "then all the disciples forsook Him and fled," yet the Holy Scriptures prove them no weaker than others, for it says, "there is no difference."

But the Son of Man, the perfection of sinless manhood, must suffer alone. Now consider how great this man was, "for He took not on Him the nature of angels," else millions for defense had compassed Him about, but He took on Him the seed of Abraham, and they, His brethren according to the flesh, conspired to kill Him.

When, however, the testing time comes to the lowly Nazarene in the wilderness, Gethsemane or Golgotha it finds in Him no weakness at all; but when man is tried, his boastful strength often gives way to feebleness. The broken, though hidden strand in the cable is manifested when the pressure is greatest, and the need sorest; the defective flue meets every apparent demand until the unexpected occurs, and the awful catastrophe ensues.

Adam, clothed in innocence with exhaustless resources in his Creator God, involves himself and all the race in ruin, though placed under the most favorable auspices. The faith of the father of the faithful was deficient in the country of Abimelech. The meekness of Moses succumbed at the pressure of Meribah. The sweet singer of Israel, the man after God's own heart, King David, fell an easy prey to lust. The patience of even a Job

deserted him in his trying ordeal. The giant of Carmel weakened through his fears at Jezreel. "Then all his disciples forsook him and fled." Judas betrayed Him, Peter denied Him, "they all forsook Him."

Peter may have criticized Judas. John perhaps condemned Peter; "they all forsook him." There was no room for boasting, for when weighed in the balances, they were all found wanting. They all failed; and does not the Spirit admonish us when he says, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall." When sitting in judgment on others, is it not profitable to scan our own past, and learn a lesson in charity, as we behold ourselves closely allied to others whom we so quickly condemn.

Long years ago, a magnificent woman as the world goes, conspicuous in the church and social circles, wealthy, and in a measure benevolent, refused to aid a laudable effort in behalf of the fallen, while her own fifteen year old boy was hatefully involved with one of this hated class but a few blocks away from her own lovely home. In condemning them, by her indifference, she unconsciously included her boy; she had a deep interest in them, but knew it not; she sat in judgment upon the erring ones; she refused to become interested in those whom her charity was not broad enough to cover; popular, handsome, the idol of a select circle, a church member, but the mantle of her charity was moth eaten.

Satan came that dark and dreadful night to sift Peter as wheat, whom the all knowing One had faithfully warned, but whose kindly admonitions were unappreciated, hence unheeded.

Peter, "every whit clean," on the word of his Lord, goes down ingloriously, contracting defilement in his walk, as he followed afar off. He could not watch one hour in the close inner circle in the garden; he now appears to neither watch nor pray as he had been admonished to do. "And it was night," when Peter took his wayward steps walking "in the counsel of the ungodly," as he stood "in the way of sinners," as he sat "in the seat of the scornful."

Peter was here to see the end, where the Lamb thus led to the slaughter, oppressed and afflicted, opened not his mouth; for he was to pass through God's school, learning obedience for Peter and for us by what he suffered.

"And it was night" in the heart of the sorely alarmed, but now fully estranged Peter. Intoxicated through his fears, he hoped to lose himself in the crowd of servants and officers who had made a fire of coals, for it was cold, and (as) they warmed themselves, Peter stood with them, and warmed himself. Lying follows in the wake of declension, as darkness comes with the night. How could Peter admit himself the disciple of a malefactor without partaking of his shame?

Peter was in a position to verify the words of Isaiah fifty-three, when the crowd of which he was an insignificant part, struck his Lord, but in his silence he consents to the deed, for had

Peter the heart to offer a protest, his speech had betrayed him. Think of Peter with muzzled mouth, the mute witness of indignities he was powerless to resist. In Satan's sieve, but on Jesus' heart, the object of Jesus' love, the subject of Jesus' prayer.

The crowd in which Peter sought to lose his identity gave inspiration to his disaffection; the heat of the enemy's coals quickly warmed into life the latent viper. His denials like the pent mountain torrent, gathered force by what opposed it, for when another said, "this fellow was with Jesus of Nazareth," he denied with an oath, saying, "I do not know the man," and again he began to curse and swear, saying, "I know not the man."

O the sweet provision of restoring grace; how more than awful to have sin's dark pall envelope you, and no sympathizing Lord to recognize you in the hateful crowd that rejoiced in your sin and witnessed your fall and failure; how awful to have no tears of contrition to respond to his look of compassionate concern when we have erred; to sin like many, and in blindness deny it. If Peter needed the tender searching look of his Lord to convince him that he had sinned, so all need the Holy Spirit to enlighten them through God's most Holy Word, when they are led through the evil one to claim to have passed the sinning point. Had the masters in Israel been as well taught in the old Scriptures as in the traditions of their fathers, they would have recognized the "man of sorrows," of whom Isaiah had plainly written, "And when smiting him with the palms of their hands," they must have apprehended through Micah's words of wisdom, "The Judge of Israel."

Peter was in the crowd, but not of it; he had lost his joy, but not his salvation; and while the crowd appeared a unit against Jesus, the Lord knew that Peter who had contracted defilement in the way, needed not save to wash his feet, but was clean every whit. Thanks be unto God for the look of a Lord that starts the tears in Peter's eyes. The tears which lead to confession have a joyous issue in restoration. "He restoreth my soul"; how sweet to know that the restorer of my soul is touched with a feeling of my infirmities.

O to be conscious that the eyes of the Lord are following us in our uneven course, detecting the defections from and the defections in the circumspect walk that is urged upon the children of God by the Holy Ghost. But the eyes are not those of a detective in espionage, to ferret out our shortcomings and expose them, but rather tenderly to remind us of his helpful presence with us—"Lo I am with you alway."

How sweet to think of his knowledge of us, his care for us, his joy in restoring us. O man, consider this undeserved care, this unrequited affection, this superabounding love as it floats out forever from the fountain of grace in God's anointed, to those who are his.

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